

11.16.2007 - Thanksgiving Message

One of our Nation's great traditions is the Thanksgiving holiday, a time to gather together with family and friends and reflect on our many blessings.

America is a Nation of liberty and justice -- a shining beacon of hope. America has also always been a place of opportunity, a land to which our forefathers flocked to seek new and better lives for themselves and their families. And Americans, recognizing our great fortune, have always willingly served to protect and preserve the bountiful gifts He has so generously granted.

In October of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued his proclamation making Thanksgiving an official holiday. Lincoln's message is just as valid today as in his time, especially with tens of thousands of American troops serving overseas. These moving words, spoken over 140 years ago, comprise what I believe to be one of the best descriptions of the true meaning of America's Thanksgiving:

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.

"In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

"Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore.

"Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

"No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

'It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.

"And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union."

At too many West Virginia families' tables this Thanksgiving there will be an empty seat, a seat belonging to a service member, standing in harm's way far from home. I offer assurances to these families that their fellow West Virginians are thankful for their sacrifices and those of all our troops, whose service maintains our security and enables America to remain the land of opportunity and prosperity Lincoln so eloquently described.

May God be with our soldiers, their families, and all West Virginians on this Thanksgiving and always. My family and I wish each of you a blessed holiday.